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# Defence Briefing

## THE RENUCLEARISATION OF EUROPE

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INTRODUCTION

The Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty is the first to actually remove a class of nuclear weapons, rather than merely place limits on their growth. It will remove two categories of land-based nuclear missiles: Long-Range INF (LRINF), with a range of 1000-5000km; and Short-range INF (SRINF), which have a range of 500-1000km. The Treaty places no restrictions on the proliferation of sea- and air-launched missiles, or on land-based weapons of shorter range. The USA and NATO are preparing to introduce new weapons in all these categories.

US and NATO officials have variously called this a process of 'compensation' or 'substitution', but now prefer the more neutral term 'modernisation'. The effect of the new deployments will be to boost NATO's nuclear capability to a level greater than that with cruise and Pershing. Sea- and Air-launched cruise missiles (SLCM and ALCM) can be considered direct replacements for INF weapons. Others (particularly a new rocket system known as MLRS) represent a major escalation; while the possibility of nuclear ALCMs on tactical aircraft opens up a new area of the arms race, since there is no evidence that the Warsaw Pact has any similar weapons.

NATO'S MONTEBELLO PROGRAMME

Apart from SLCMs[1], the new deployments originate in decisions made by NATO's Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) at Montebello, Canada, in October 1983. The NPG communique stated that NATO had decided '... to withdraw 1,400 warheads during the next several years' - but also that Ministers had 'identified a range of possible improvements' and 'established broad criteria'[2] for the modernisation of the remaining systems. These improvements and criteria were not publicly identified at the time.

Throughout the 1983-87 Parliament, the UK Government insisted that 'no decisions on modernisation as it effects British forces have yet been taken'[3]; but in November 1987 the Secretary of State for Defence, George Younger, spoke of 'the implementation of the decisions that were taken four years ago at Montebello'[4]. That programme has never been revealed in detail to the UK Parliament; but testimony to the US Congress by former NATO Commander General Rogers and others gives a clearer picture of the weapons under development.

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THE WEAPONS

1. Nuclear Artillery

Belgium, Greece, West Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Turkey, and the UK operate nuclear artillery, using US warheads under dual control - the US operates the warheads, while another country operates the howitzers. About 900 new nuclear warheads are planned.

A new 8" nuclear shell (the W-79) was first produced in 1981, but was not deployed in Europe due to political opposition to 'enhanced radiation' (ER) weapons - or 'neutron bombs'. It was then converted to a different version, which is stored in Europe as a 'normal' nuclear warhead, but can be made into an ER weapon with the addition of a special module, which is stored separately. Such shells are known as 'ER-capable'. About 200 W-79 warheads have been deployed in Europe since 1985.

Britain will not be operating 8" artillery, concentrating instead on the 155mm calibre. A new 155mm shell (known as the W-82) is expected to start production later this year. About 400 will be deployed in Europe. It will have a range of up 30km and a yield of 2 kilotons (compared with 14km and 0.1 kilotons for its predecessor); like the W-79, it is ER-capable.

2. Sea-launched Cruise Missiles

The main type of SLCM is the US Tomahawk cruise, which in ground-launched form is the missile based at Greenham Common. Land-based cruise will be removed under the INF treaty, but the US Navy is procuring 4,000 SLCM, of which 758 will be nuclear (using the W-80-1 warhead with a yield of 5-150 kilotons); the rest will have conventional warheads.

SLCMs can be launched from a wide variety of ships and submarines, and by 1995 it is intended that a third of the US Navy should carry SLCMs. By then there will be about 100 US ships and submarines carrying about 380 nuclear SLCMs in European waters. In the UK they have already called at the Holy Loch, and also may use port facilities at Plymouth, Portsmouth and London.

There are no known plans for European navies to purchase SLCMs, but they can be fired from standard torpedo tubes and from the Vertical Launch System (VLS) for the Harpoon missile, which is being fitted to Britain's Vanguard class Trident submarines, and to the Royal Navy's new hunter-killer submarines.

3. Air-launched Cruise Missiles

The Government's 1987 Defence White Paper counts NATO as having 650 nuclear strike aircraft in Europe, all of which currently carry free-fall bombs; but NATO military chiefs have been calling since about 1985 for a stand-off (i.e. long-range) air-to-surface missile of some form, which could be fired from within NATO territory to replace the present free-fall bombs. This is intended to increase 'survivability' by enabling aircraft to fire without having to enter hostile territory.

Several ALCM options are under development within NATO. The US and six other countries (including Britain, France and West Germany) are discussing the joint development of a Modular Stand-Off Weapon (MSOW), which could be fired from NATO F-16, Tornado and other aircraft. Nuclear warheads could also be fitted to the US Joint Tactical Missile System (JTACMS), a deep-strike cruise missile developed jointly by the US Army and Air Force; this weapon could be carried on tactical aircraft, giving them the capability to perform a strategic role. Britain and France are holding separate discussions on the

possibility of a joint development of an ALCM for Tornado and Mirage. The US and France are likely to proceed alone if discussions fall through.

In the nearer term, NATO may deploy more nuclear bombers in Britain. There are already about 150 F-111s based at Lakenheath and Upper Heyford, and Defence Secretary George Younger has offered RAF Greenham and RAF Alconbury (near Molesworth) as bases for the F-111 or its planned replacement, the F-15E. RAF nuclear Tornadoes are based at RAF Honington and RAF Marham, and in West Germany.

4. Ground-launched Missiles

At present NATO has 90 launchers equipped with 690 short range missiles called Lance, with a 125km range. The preferred option for its replacement is now a 300-400km range missile to be launched from the US Multiple-Launch Rocket System (MLRS). Mounted on a tank chassis, MLRS is capable of firing a wide range of nuclear and conventional missiles; there are also reports that a chemical warhead is being developed. So far France, Holland, Italy, the UK and West Germany have ordered MLRS, and it is likely that by the mid-1990s NATO will deploy some 600 MLRS systems - equivalent to 1,200 single launchers, since MLRS is a twin firing unit. The final figure may be much higher.

The manufacturers claim that one MLRS is equivalent to an entire battalion of normal artillery: its rapid reloading time makes it a very powerful weapon. The fact that MLRS is used in the 1987 Defence White Paper to depict artillery suggests that it will be the mainstay of NATO armies in the next decade, more than outstripping any percieved Soviet superiority in this category.

If developed (it is facing opposition in Congress), a nuclear warhead for MLRS is likely to be based on either or both of the JTACMS, or ATACMS (Army Tactical Missile System). ATACMS is a deep-strike ballistic missile being developed by the US Army. At present only conventional warheads are authorised for JTACMS and ATACMS, but studies for nuclear warheads are underway.

5. Other Weapons

Britain and France are also modernising their own nuclear forces. Britain's purchase of the US Trident D-5 missile system will increase its nuclear strike capability by a factor of up to 4; and the French short-range (120km) Pluton rockets are due to be replaced in the 1990s by the Hades system, with a 500km range. France is also planning new submarine-launched ballistic missiles for the 1990s (the M-5), and a ground-launched weapon similar to Pershing II, the Intermediate Range S-4. Also, 70 of France's Mirage 2000 aircraft are to be equipped with a stand-off weapon, the ASMP.

THE POLITICS OF MODERNISATION

Far from leading to the de-nuclearisation of Europe feared by the political and military establishment, the INF treaty may fail to prevent a massive qualitative escalation of Europe's nuclear stockpiles. The introduction of SLCMs can be regarded as a direct replacement for ground-launched cruise and pose severe verification problems for arms control. ALCMs represent a massive increase in NATO's ability to hit the USSR: they would be capable of hitting the same range of targets as their ground-launched counterparts, but with a shorter flight time. Politically, they would be highly provocative.

The European Central Front is the most heavily militarised zone in the world, and the presence of battlefield nuclear weapons increases the chances of any conflict becoming nuclear: a commander could rapidly be faced with a choice of

'use them or lose them'. They are widely regarded as militarily useless, and there is a growing consensus in West Germany that battlefield nuclear weapons should be the next item on the disarmament agenda.

The idea of a central European zone free of nuclear weapons is already the subject of a draft agreement drawn up by the East German SED (Communist Party) and the West German SPD (Social Democrats). The Soviet Union has offered to negotiate reductions in battlefield and other tactical nuclear weapons, which NATO has categorically refused. In the absence of any restrictions, is it pursuing an expensive and destabilising modernisation programme.

## CONCLUSION

With the removal of older and less capable systems, the Montebello programme may (as NATO claims) reduce the total number of NATO nuclear warheads in Europe; but their replacement with more powerful and accurate ones threatens not just a military escalation, but a loss of the political momentum generated by the INF treaty.

TABLE: Possible US nuclear stockpile in Europe in 1995.

| | *Dec. 1987* | *After Modernisation 1992-95* |
|---|---|---|
| ALCM (replacing free-fall) | 0 | ~1,300 |
| Free-fall Bombs | 1,600 | ~800 |
| MLRS (replacing Lance) | 0 | ~600 |
| Lance | 692 | 0 |
| Pershing I | 72 | 0 |
| Pershing II | 120 | 0 |
| GLCM | 309 | 0 |
| Artillery (155mm & 8") | ~1,600 | ~900 |
| Nuclear depth bombs | 190 | 190 |
| (SLCM) | | 380 |
| *TOTAL STOCKPILE* | *~4600* | *~4200* |

Sources: Current stockpile: SIPRI Yearbook 1987; IISS, The Military Balance 1987-88
Projected stockpile: SIPRI; NATO's New Nuclear Weapons, British American Security Information Council.

1. Sea-launched cruise are not a part of the Montebello package, and will be under the control of the US rather than NATO. They are referred to here because their deployment in Europe coincides with the removal of ground-launched cruise, for which NATO ministers have clearly identified them as a replacement.

2. NATO Nuclear Planning Group: Communique and annex. 28 October 1983.

3. Hansard, 22 April 1987, col 588.

4. Hansard, 10th November 1987, col 151.